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## CRITICAL NOTICES.

## MCNEILE'S "EXODUS."

*Westminster Commentaries. The Book of Exodus, with Introduction and Notes.* By A. H. MCNEILE, B.D. (Methuen, 1908. 10s. 6d.)

REFERENCE was made to the primary objects of this series in a notice of Professor Driver's *Genesis* (*J. Q. R.*, XVII, 184 sqq.). The present volume by the Rev. A. H. McNeile, B.D., is of the same general character, that is to say, it is mainly exegetical, all textual and philological details being subordinated but not ignored. The text of the Revised Version is reproduced, and every care is taken to render it intelligible to modern readers by brief explanatory notes on the meaning or the subject-matter. Several useful longer and detached notes are interspersed; they handle special questions, e.g. the Divine names, various institutions (circumcision, passover, sabbath, covenant), chap. xv, &c. A careful introduction of 136 pages deals with the bearing of modern criticism and research upon the book, "drawing out," in accordance with the plan of the series, "the contribution which the book as a whole makes to the body of religious truth." Here are eight sections on the literary analysis, the laws (in relation to Hammurabi's code), the priesthood and tabernacle, the geography and history, and the historical and religious value of Exodus. The interests of Exodus are so varied and the problems so profound that a modern and independent English commentary from the capable hands of Mr. McNeile cannot fail to be welcome. In Exodus, if anywhere, the intricate questions of geography, history, and religion, and the very unequal studies of modern writers need a firm and discriminating judgment, an adequate grasp of the many aspects of the book, and a conciliatory pen, having regard to the class of readers to whom the series appeals. And in general Mr. McNeile has used his authorities skilfully, he has adopted sound opinions which, where they conflict with cherished traditional views, are put clearly and tactfully, and has furnished his own contribution to some of the more intricate technical problems.

Any criticisms that suggest themselves must in fairness make every allowance for the object of the series, which precludes lengthy detailed discussion. The brevity and conciseness thus forced upon

the commentator cause a certain inequality of treatment—unavoidable, since every one has his own ideas as to what readers ought to know, and what is most informing and helpful. It is right that readers should know that there is little in Exodus which can safely be called Mosaic, but one misses an attentive notice of the recent studies by Ed. Meyer and B. Luther (*Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme*, 1906), one of the most important books of its kind. The short sketch of Egyptian history is useful (pp. 12–14), but it should have referred to the strong Semitic influence in Egypt at the (traditional) period of the Exodus<sup>1</sup>. The excursus on the name Yahweh ought at least to have mentioned the external evidence adduced for Yahweh (viz. the forms *Ya*, *Yawi*) in contemporary Palestine. I do not perceive on what grounds the Hebrew alphabet is said to date “from a period long before the Exodus” (p. 103); the Phoenician evidence to which he refers belongs not to the tenth but rather to the eighth century (Landau, E. Meyer, G. A. Cooke). In the note on the high-priest’s precious stones (p. 179) the allusion to Ezek. xxviii. 13 would have gained in force had it been pointed out that there the stones are worn by a traditional semi-divine being in the “garden of the gods.” The form *Ašratu* quoted in the note on the *Asherim* (p. 218 sq.) is the plural of *Ashirta*, and the denial of the existence of this goddess belongs to the past, though her relation to the *ashērah* is still disputed. For the Phoenician evidence reference should have been made to some modern source, e.g. G. A. Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, p. 50 sq., or Père Lagrange, *Études sur les Religions Sémitiques* (2nd ed., 1905). The latter is indispensable for the study of the old oriental religions; Mr. McNeile, so far as I have observed, does not include it in his Bibliography.

I must confess that I am inclined to question whether it is legitimate method to rationalize each and every event which appears to *us* to partake of the miraculous. Thus, the plagues have a natural foundation (pp. cx, 43–46), the crossing of the Red Sea is due to a verifiable phenomenon, the pillar of cloud may have been a burning brazier at the head of an army, and so on. I have even read somewhere an ingenious attempt to identify manna with snow! There will be little need to talk of the extremeness of advanced critics if their more moderate brethren hold that the great epic of Israel arose from natural phenomena of the above character. There

<sup>1</sup> On p. cix *Ashalni* for *Askalni* is one of the rare misprints. The suggestion (in the footnote) that Merenptah’s inscription refers to Jezeel and not Israel is not allowed by Egyptologists, who point out that “[his, their] seed is not” was a current conventional phrase.

is undoubtedly a dilemma, but I conceive that it is caused by the immediate anxiety to recover the historical stratum, or to adapt oriental writings to modern theology without sufficient preliminary attention to the surviving historical traditions, and to the religious environment which produced them<sup>1</sup>. In scholarship the pursuit of truth is often not so important as the uprooting of error; the weeds are growing while the garden is deserted by those who search vainly for the underlying basis of fact.

Mr. McNeile, like every other scholar, has formulated his conceptions of early Israelite history and religion, but in agreement with the rest they have no cohesion. The ancestors of the Israelites were roving, pastoral nomads (p. 141), and possibly only "part of the Israelite clan" (p. cix) were in Egypt. There they were "an insignificant tribe," nomads occupying pastoral land, pressed into compulsory labour (cix sq.). Under certain circumstances—which later tradition has obviously idealized—they escaped and reached Sinai, "in close proximity to Kadesh and Edom," or Horeb, "east of the gulf of Akabah" (civ). Moses, by his teaching, induced the Israelites to feel that henceforth they "in all their tribal branches" were one body (cxiii), and so this "confederation of tribes, which also included a 'mixed multitude'" (cxiv), entered upon the march. In the desert they would have no fruits or corn to offer (cxv); it is also doubtful whether they possessed cattle: "the need for manna and quails implies a lack of flocks and herds" (p. 204). On entering Canaan they were greatly in the minority as regards numbers, they were divided geographically, but were knit by a strong national bond (cvii). "But they gradually won their way to a national and political unity" (ibid.); and, incidentally, they acquired some skill in handicraft (cxiv). Yet "minuteness of personal detail, the vivid picturesqueness of the scenes described, the true touches of character," &c., are elsewhere regarded as indications of historical fact (cxii). Of course, Mr. McNeile is not writing a history, but he must fit his critical views of Exodus into an historical frame, and this frame, like

<sup>1</sup> Incidentally I would raise a mild protest against the reference to divination by an image cited from Sierra Leone (*Addenda*, p. xiv). It is very interesting, very instructive, but why ignore *contemporary* records which tell us of the "nodding" of the Egyptian idols, or the oracle given by the "finger" of the goddess Ashirat at Taanach? This is not to decry anthropological study, but to express the hope that *biblical* students may follow upon the lines laid down by the great masters in this department, and turn to and classify the store of material from the oriental world. There is a great mass of illuminating information hidden away in accessible works.

that of (I believe) every other scholar, does not do justice to the biblical evidence, to historical criticism, or to external evidence<sup>1</sup>. Experience is constantly showing that where the historical element in a tradition becomes doubtful, only contemporary or external evidence can supply the test. The biblical traditions are absolutely conflicting, but no preconceptions as to the historical kernel or religious conditions of pre-Mosaic religion can serve for a starting-point.

Mr. McNeile utters a timely warning against a modern extreme school (p. xcii), but he does not discriminate between the evidence which its adherents adduce and the peculiar theories they build upon it. It is futile to proceed from the unknown to the known. Surely the *initial* problem is not to determine what the Israelites brought, but what the Canaanites had to give. The scattered results of Palestinian excavation were presented synthetically and fairly by the learned Father Hugues Vincent more than a year ago, in a work which no biblical student can afford to ignore (*Canaan d'après l'exploration récente*). Here and elsewhere those who wish to reconstruct history and religion may read of the Semitic cults in the Sinaitic peninsula, and especially in Egypt itself, of the established pantheon on Palestinian soil (no crass nature-worship), of the temples and sacred places in Palestine and Syria devoted to Egyptian and Semitic cults. These conditions belong to the age of Moses and the conquest, and though we know that there was some development in Israelite history, this development must be viewed in the light which modern research has been bringing to bear.

The recognition that the old writers were the children of their age, and that there were certain profound developments in religion and morals has manifested the permanent value of the Old Testament. The difficulties which attended its use for religious exposition and study have been removed by modern criticism. But for biblical history, archaeology, anthropology, &c.—for all subjects which at the present day must be handled in the light of all available knowledge, we at once enter upon specialist or technical work; the Old Testament in fact becomes part of the growing literature of the ancient oriental world, and more methodical and thorough principles of research are required.

These remarks are not directed against a writer, a book, or a series, but against an attitude or perspective which Mr. McNeile shares with many other biblical scholars. They do not detract

<sup>1</sup> Of all the histories and hypotheses (up to and including that of Dr. Burney in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, April, 1908) the fairest is that of H. P. Smith in his *Old Testament History*. But he does not venture upon a reconstruction.

from the real value of a book which will hold an honourable position among the *Westminster Commentaries*, and will worthily stand next to Professor Driver's *Genesis*. My remarks would merely urge that there comes a stage where exegesis is influenced by one's formulated views of the course of Israelite history, and that the prevailing views cannot stand against external evidence. In this I may claim the support of those who have attempted independent reconstructions of their own, and I would emphasize the fact that their disagreement among themselves as to the particular form which the reconstruction must take is not so significant as their recognition that a new one is necessary.

STANLEY A. COOK.

#### DR. PHILIPSON'S HISTORY OF REFORM JUDAISM.

*The Reform Movement in Judaism.* By David Philipson, D.D. New York: the Macmillan Co., 1907. Pp. viii, 581.

CONSIDERABLY over a century has elapsed since German Jewry first felt the pangs of the new birth now known as Reform Judaism. Young hopefuls hailed the birth of another deliverer destined, as they thought, to lead them from bondage to freedom, from darkness to light. Wary, inert old age shook its disapproving head, preferring the then familiar bondage to a long-forgotten freedom, and fearing to expose its dark-adapted eyes to the glare of an unknown light. Thus, at once hailed and dreaded, blessed and cursed, the young offspring of Judaism started on its difficult path amid the loud clamour of contending parties—only to belie the prophecies of both, turning out to be neither such a blessing nor such a curse as had been foretold. True, a hundred years are but as a day in the history of a movement such as the reform movement. If the period is long enough to enable one to judge, and even to find fault, still it is at all events not long enough to justify despair. But it is time, high time indeed, to take a survey of the movement from its beginnings till the present day. This task Dr. David Philipson, of Cincinnati, has accomplished in a highly satisfactory manner. *The Reform Movement in Judaism* is a capital book, and every liberal Jew should read it. It is a thoroughly reliable history based on the original sources, to which copious references are given. Some of the chapters of this book have been separately published before, in this *Review*. But even these chapters are well worth re-reading in their fuller context.

Dr. Philipson divides his historical survey into thirteen chapters, treating of the following themes: the beginning of the reform move-